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Chipping Away At Freedom's Base

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OUR CREED

A newspaper is an instrument of public trust, privately owned but solemnly dedicated to the common weal; the crystal mirror of our daily trials and triumphs; the editorial obligation to be as just with men and measures as human imperfection will permit; a crusading force which accepts with courage the challenge of controversy, greeting hostile ideas with hospitality, understanding well that public debate is a factor in public progress; the sacred pledge to promulgate the civic, cultural and spiritual well being; the covenant to study; investigate, analyze so as to place reason and logic ahead of emotionalism and hysteria; the duty to interpret constitutional "Freedom of the Press" as meaning freedom of information to all, a torch to the many, not the flame for the few; and above all the will to be sympathetic, understanding and sincere.

Chipping Away At Freedom's Base

Tom Ethridge, the unreconstructed Rebel whose "Mississippi Notebook" column appears widely over the state, abandoned his usual common-sense approach this week to expound a defense of the college board's recent decision to "screen" speakers appearing at Mississippi's tax-supported institutions.

Mr. Ethridge errs in assuming we must protect from controversial ideas "impressionable youngsters" at our educational institutions. Colleges and universities were created to provide students with a wide variety of ideas—ideas which one normally does not learn outside higher education. Three student editors at Ole Miss, Mississippi State, and Mississippi Southern have adequately defended their right to campus freedom in recent editorials. College students are neither so mentally feeble or ideologically gullible to be taken in by every passing speaker. The best that can happen at college is for students to receive a few controversial opinions which might jar them into a little honest thinking.

Columnist Ethridge pays fleeting tribute to the principle of academic freedom before he wades into his defense of the board's screening policy. Usually those who would see freedom limited do so in the name of freedom.

Ethridge writes: "It seems odd that while many colleges always have the latch-string out for leftwing thinkers, they appear reluctant to hear speakers sympathetic with the status quo. Although Mississippians by and large favor segregation, for instance, we know of no occasion where their spokesmen have been invited to any state campus to express their views."

In defense of Mississippi educational institutions this inaccurate statement should not go unchallenged. Whether intentional or not, Mr. Ethridge leaves with his reader the impression that only leftwing integrationists are asked to speak on campuses. Certainly this is not true.

We have personal knowledge of one campus forum. Speakers are selected by a committee of students and faculty from the college's top leadership society. The committee strives for impartiality in selecting speakers who present

varying opinions. If one speaker is liberal, the next will be conservative.

Mississippi governors and congressmen have been consistent college speakers. They represent no alien philosophy, integration, nor the left wing.

The real burr under Mr. Ethridge's saddle apparently is that Hodding Carter has been invited to speak at various state institutions while Robert Patterson, leader of the recently organized Citizens Councils movement, has not.

As a leading Mississippi editor whose vigorous editorial opinions have won for him the nation's highest editorial award, the Pulitzer prize, and as author of several books, Mr. Carter is a natural for campus lectures. On the other hand, six months ago nobody knew who Robert Patterson was. Many still don't know, though in time, Mr. Patterson may well be asked to speak in defense of his organization at one of the state institutions.

The founders of this nation 200 years ago learned the presumed merit of an idea—whether leftwing, rightwing, anarchist, or totalitarian—depends on the individual who judges it.

Those American patriots discovered, that responsible men, including college educators, who are free to execute their judgment will make sound decisions in the best interests of the people. It is the basis for democracy.

When restricted only to ideas approved by the governing authority, higher education stagnates and dies. Hitler tried it. The Communists are trying it. Long before our generation the ruling monarchies of Europe tried it. The American Revolution, in fact, was a reaction to such tyranny over men's minds.

Columnist Ethridge has apparently forgotten, as many Americans often forget, the wisdom of democratic ideals. The idealistic foundation of democracy and freedom has not yet given way. If freedom ever is curtailed, it will be by the "screeners" with good intentions who are constantly chipping away at freedom's base.

If freedom dies so dies democracy. It would be thus recorded for posterity as nothing more than an interesting political experiment of the 19th Century which failed.—(J.O.E., Jr.)